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ABSTRACT

The guide is designed to assist teachers in postsecondary education, particularly vocational education, with some students from language backgrounds other than English. It both offers suggestions for classroom organization and interaction and poses questions to stimulate teachers' examination of the processes at work in the learning situation. Sections address these topics: applying general principles of good teaching in a multicultural context; encouraging students to think; teaching students to ask questions; encouraging interactive reading; providing feedback; preparing students for examinations; organizing classroom seating and interaction; vocabulary development for new concepts; encouraging students to use English language; teachers' commonly asked questions; and wording classroom questions. (MSE)

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2

WHERE DO YOU START?

WHEN SOME OF YOUR STUDENTS ARE FROM A NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING BACKGROUND

TEACHING MULTICULTURAL CLASSES

by Marilyn Lewis
and
Ray Taylor

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TAFE NSW MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION UNIT

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WHEN SOME OF YOUR STUDENTS ARE FROM NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING BACKGROUND?

2: TEACHING MULTICULTURAL CLASSES

by **Marilyn Lewis**
and
Ray Taylor

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First published in 1992
2nd Revised Edition 1996

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FOREWORD

Over the past years we have seen an increase in the number of students from Non-English Speaking Backgrounds (NESB) participating in TAFE courses. This welcome development places virtually every TAFE teacher in a new and rewarding situation, where he/she has to examine the suitability of his/ her teaching practice. As the authors conclude in this handbook "good teaching practice in the multicultural classroom makes good teaching for all students".

This handbook is a revised edition of training materials first published in 1992. It is intended to constitute the second step in a structured manageable sequence of professional development for vocational teachers new to working with NESB students, as outlined in our wall-chart "Where do you start when some of your students are from a non-English speaking background?" While based on a series of training workshops, this handbook is designed for the individual to dip into as needed. Later steps in the recommended sequence involve participation in workshops.

The authors were approached to develop and make their training material available to all teachers in TAFE, a task they took up with enthusiasm. They are to be thanked for their valuable efforts and contribution.

Victor Boulos
Principal Officer
Multicultural Education Unit
July 1995

CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	5
1 Applying General Principles of Teaching	6
2 Encouraging Students to Think	9
3 Teaching Students to Ask Questions	11
4 Interactive Reading	13
5 Providing Feedback	15
6 Preparing Students for Examinations	16
7 Organising the Classroom	18
8 New Vocabulary for New Concepts	20
9 Encouraging Students to Use New Language	23
10 Teachers' Questions	26
Conclusion	29
References	30

INTRODUCTION

The topics presented in this booklet are the result of seminars held in various TAFE colleges at the end of 1989, when the TAFE Multicultural Education Unit through Dorothy Brown invited us to work with teachers at their end-of-year in-service courses and to formulate some of these ideas into booklet form.

Underlying the topics is the following philosophy: The classroom learning experiences of students from language backgrounds other than English is, in many ways, not so different from the experience of native speakers of English. Their needs differ in degree rather than in kind.

The courses which this book is based on involved interaction amongst the teachers who were the course members. Unfortunately a book cannot capture this interaction. However, we have tried to set out the material in ways that will stimulate your thinking as you work in multicultural classrooms. The sections are not arranged in priority order. Dip into topics that seem relevant to you. It makes some suggestions and it poses some questions. As you work through them you could ask yourself two questions:

- *"Which of my present teaching practices could be adapted to suit better all the students in my class? "*
- *"What fresh materials, techniques and learning tasks could I develop next?"*

As the book moves into its second edition we are once more grateful to Dorothy Brown who not only provided the original motivation and the practical planning for the original seminars, but has also taken the time to suggest some improvements for this edition.

Marilyn Lewis, Auckland
Ray Taylor, New York

1. APPLYING GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF TEACHING

One way of approaching teaching strategies in multicultural classrooms is to consider what a good teacher does in regular classes and then to think of details that need modifying when working with new learners of English. Here is a list based on the experiences of many teachers.

A good teacher.....

1.1 EXPLAINS THE POINT OF THE LESSON TO THE STUDENTS

Usually the lesson outcomes are written on the board or on a handout. An alternative to words can be to:

- show a sample of a finished piece of work
- show photographs of work situations where people are doing the skill to be learned
- demonstrate the skill at the final speed before slowing down or breaking it into parts to teach it.

1.2 MOTIVATES STUDENTS

When you work with students from a variety of backgrounds you may find that different things motivate different people to do well. The better you know your students individually and as members of dual societies, the more effectively you will be able to motivate them. Here are some questions to ask about the people you teach.

- ❑ Do they enjoy being praised in front of other students?
- ❑ Who are their role models?
- ❑ Which of their out-of class experiences are relevant to your subject?
- ❑ Do they find it motivating to work individually or in pairs or in groups?

- ❑ Do they respond to comparison between their work and other students'?
- ❑ Are they motivated or discouraged by having grades/ marks for each piece of work?

1.3 INVOLVES STUDENTS

Student involvement is easy when students and teacher express themselves in the same way. Students who are accustomed to the teacher who lectures for the whole hour, often think that the teacher who sets other tasks is lazy. Show your class the point of learning tasks. Say for instance ...

"You are going to take turns at presenting reports to the class because when you start work one of the things you'll have to do is present reports on ...".

1.4 CHECKS UNDERSTANDING

Asking "Have you understood?" is not an effective way of checking students' understanding. Try some of these techniques instead.

Students

- ❑ explain something back.
- ❑ re-order instructions to check whether they have understood the process.
- ❑ demonstrate a skill in pairs

The teacher

- ❑ sets questions that test subject knowledge rather than skills in English.
- ❑ asks follow-up questions with "why?' and "how?'.
- ❑ finds out if one part of the topic is understood before going on to the next.

1.5 PROVIDES A VARIETY OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES

Often a single topic can be presented in a number of ways. How many of these could you use in one topic:

- ❑ a case study
- ❑ a set of guidelines
- ❑ questions and answers
- ❑ material from the work force with learning tasks attached
- ❑ information with gaps to be completed as the learner listens or watches.
- ❑ comparisons and contasts with the same skill in other countries. (This is possible if your teaching staff are from a range of cultural backgrounds).

1.6 ENCOURAGES STUDENTS TO THINK

This subject is expanded in the next three sections.

2. ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO THINK

Learning involves going beyond what has been learned in class. It includes thinking for oneself about the new learning. The great strength of a multicultural class is that you have in one room students who have learned to think in a great variety of ways. Their answers to your questions, provided you ask open questions, are no longer as predictable as they are when all your students come from the same educational system. In this section we present some typical "problems" as perceived by teachers, along with some ideas you could try, to turn these problems into strengths.

ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO THINK

Which of these is your concern?	Try these ideas
"My students see me as the only source of truth in the room. They don't like listening to one another's viewpoints".	When you organise group tasks, move around the room giving input to each group.
	When students make worthwile suggestions, sum them up on the board so other students don't miss them.
"I find that students want the right answer to every question. They can't accept that some things are absolute".	Distinguish the parts of your topic where there are facts and the parts where different viewpoints have to be taken into account.
	In your handouts include a variety of direct quotations from people qualified in your field, so students see that differences of opinion are common.
"Some students are afraid that having to think in new ways means rejecting the values of their families".	Choose your examples from a variety of cultural backgrounds.
	Include people from many ethnic backgrounds as visiting speakers or as source people for community surveys.
	Encourage the recruitment of teachers from the same ethnic origin as the students.

3. TEACHING STUDENTS TO ASK QUESTIONS

The number and quality of students' questions are a sign of their thinking and understanding. Teachers frequently say they want students to ask more and better questions.

WHAT MAKES STUDENTS GOOD QUESTIONERS?

Good classroom questions are asked when the following factors come together. How many of these factors do you feel you have some control over in your class?

- ❑ an inquiring mind
- ❑ having their questions answered thoughtfully by teachers.
- ❑ hearing other people's thoughtful questions
- ❑ something tangible to ask questions about
- ❑ enough vocabulary to put a question into words
- ❑ knowing a variety of question forms in English
- ❑ being in a class where other students don't laugh or show impatience when someone asks a question
- ❑ believing that the person you are asking can provide some answers

In a multicultural classroom, students may have come from school systems where asking questions of a teacher is not a normal part of classroom learning. You may have to work hard at first to show by your answers to their questions that you believe questions are part of the students' responsibility for their own learning.

HOW CAN THE TEACHER HELP?

Here are some specific suggestions for teaching your students to ask questions. By the time you have tried them out, you will probably have more hints to pass on to colleagues.

- ❑ Make your own questions good and varied models for students to imitate: Wh ____ questions with rising intonation, yes – no questions with falling intonation. Remember that negative questions are difficult for all students.

- ❑ Ask students to read something at home and prepare questions for the next day. Start the next lesson with questions and answers.

- ❑ Stop part-way through the lesson for question time. Give a minute or two for students to write down questions.

- ❑ Move around the room while students are doing a task so that they can ask you questions informally.

- ❑ Remind students of the different kinds of questions they could be asking about a particular topic. (Some "why" questions, some "how" questions, and so on.)

- ❑ Spend time in class explaining why questions are important in understanding a new idea.

- ❑ Ask students to hand in written questions before a lesson.

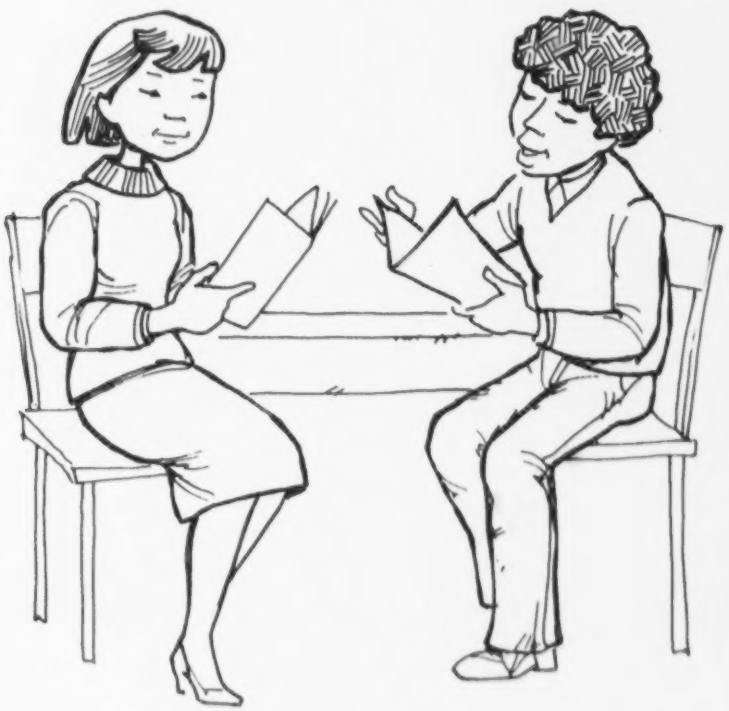
- ❑ Talk about other places to go for answers to their questions: another student, people in the workforce, books, periodicals, the library

- ❑ Provide data that makes people want to ask questions about it.

- ❑ The teacher's own questions become a model of good questions.

4. INTERACTIVE READING

The following suggestions for encouraging your students to think as they read could be applied to all classes. However, they are even more necessary if your students think of academic reading as something passive, whereby they simply find out facts they didn't know before.



The idea of interactive reading is that the reader brings something to the text. Not all readers do this automatically. For some, the struggle to decode the text is enough. For others, books have been expensive, rare tools in their schooling and a source of all the "answers".

To overcome these problems you can try setting guided reading tasks which allow students to think **as** they are reading. This is different from the traditional "comprehension" questions set **after** reading to see what they have remembered and understood.

INTERACTIVE READING

When students read a text they are bringing together their past experiences, their thoughts and what the writer has said. Here are tasks to increase the interaction.

SAMPLE INTERACTIVE READING TASKS

Ask questions Before you read this article, look at the title and any subheadings. Then write down some questions you would like the article to answer.

Recall examples As you read, each time the writer makes a point, write down one example from your own past experience.

Agree or disagree Also, tick (✓) the viewpoints you agree with and cross (✗) those you disagree with.

Note new ideas Use a highlighter on parts of the chapter that tell you something you didn't know before.

Note queries Put a question mark (?) in the margin beside everything you'd like to question in class later.

Express opinions Write an opposite point of view for some of the opinions expressed in this article.

Predict As you finish each paragraph try predicting what the next one will be about.

Some topics lend themselves to one kind of thinking more than another. You will no doubt think of many more tasks appropriate to particular topics you teach to your students and the reading matter.

5. PROVIDING FEEDBACK

Many of the general guidelines for providing students with feedback on their work apply equally to a multicultural classroom.

However, in a multicultural classroom there are further considerations. Students may not follow the subtleties of your comments. Intonation that is meant to be encouraging may sound critical to the student. Here are some suggestions:

- ❑ Specific comments are more helpful than general comments.
- ❑ Comment on aspects the student can do something about.
- ❑ Show examples of good work for students to measure their efforts by.
- ❑ Encourage students to comment on one another's work in their own languages.
- ❑ Ask students first what they think about their own work to remind yourself of the words they can understand.
- ❑ Support your words with encouraging facial expressions. Comment during, not after, a demonstration.
- ❑ Offer to take time to discuss written feedback individually later.

New learners of English do not want to be patronised. You need not pretend a piece of work is good when everyone, including the student, can see that it isn't. Your role in providing feedback is to guide the students in knowing exactly why a piece of work is good or not up to standard, to motivate them to keep trying, despite their extra load of having to work through a new language.

6. PREPARING STUDENTS FOR EXAMINATIONS

For all students there are at least four steps in doing an examination successfully.

- ❑ Understanding the subject matter.
- ❑ Understanding the examination question.
- ❑ Remembering what has been understood.
- ❑ Writing an answer in an acceptable form.

For all students, but particularly for new learners of English, there are some further barriers:

- ❑ The language of the examination instruction is different from normal spoken language.
- ❑ Several instructions are given in one sentence, with the result that students answer only part of the question.
- ❑ Students don't know the conventions of setting out written answers.
- ❑ They write slowly, searching for exactly the right word.

Some tactics teachers have adopted to overcome these barriers are suggested here. Remember also that clearly worded examination questions are appreciated by all students.

- ❑ Sometimes use the written form of the instruction when you are speaking in class. This applies particularly to abstract words like 'factors', 'principles', 'features' and so on, which are not subject-specific.

- ❑ Give students practice in breaking down a question into its separate parts.

- ❑ Show students how to turn a written question into a spoken question in order to get to the heart of it.
  e.g. Give reasons for = Why?
  What proportion of = How much?

- ❑ Discuss frequently used terms like 'brief', 'main', 'comment' and 'relationship'.

- ❑ Show model answers and analyse them.

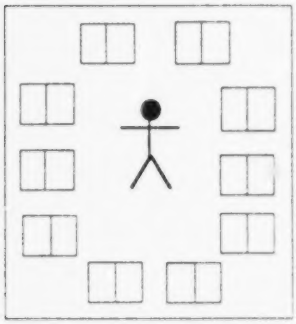
- ❑ Compare good answers and poorer answers. Discuss the differences.

- ❑ Give practice in writing answers within time limits.

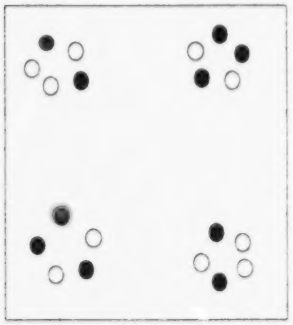
As well as preparing their students for examinations, many teachers of multicultural classes also campaign for the wording of examination questions to be clearer. Some have allowed students to have a general dictionary in the examination.

7. ORGANISING THE CLASSROOM

A multicultural classroom may be varied in many more ways than country of origin. There are likely to be differences of age, of social class and in previous levels of schooling, to mention just three. Teachers can organise tasks for small groups, pairs or individuals to cater for individual differences. Here are some suggestions:

1. 

Paired work with a more able student teaching another. The teacher is available as a resource.

2. 

Small groups work with a particular focus:

A. Same language grouping

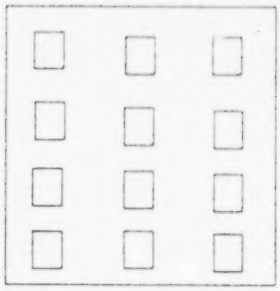
To discuss new learning in their own language. This helps concept formation and links new learning to old learning which may have been done in a different language.

B. Cross-language grouping

To use the new English terms in the subject as they comment on samples of work or solve problems.

C. Same ability grouping

To look at extension material at various levels.

3. 

Individual work using graded materials with self-marking guides.

4. Whole class teaching

For watching a demonstration or for listening to the teacher's initial explanation.

Arrangements such as those suggested here demand a good source of learning materials and a well-organised teacher. The students also need to understand how different groupings help different aspects of their learning.

8. NEW VOCABULARY FOR NEW CONCEPTS

Having a wide vocabulary in the subjects they are studying is the basis of being able to talk and write about that subject. Other people can understand what is said or written despite some errors in grammar, but without content words there is no meaning.

As you read these suggestions for building up your students' vocabulary, try to think of examples from the subjects you teach.

8.1 FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCES

Understanding the meaning of new terms is much easier if real things are happening at the same time. How can you organise first-hand experiences in your subjects?

e.g. Students at the keyboard watching and touching as the teacher introduces some basic theory of computing skills.

8.2 PICTURES AND PHOTOGRAPHS

In many classrooms it is unrealistic to talk about having first-hand experiences. In this case pictures, photographs and models are a good second best.

e.g. In a horticultural class students match a list of terms with sketches of different types of plant.
Models are used to teach concepts and vocabulary in building.

8.3 DEMONSTRATIONS

Some subjects appear to lend themselves to demonstrations more readily than others. The easiest demonstration is using your hands to show movement and space, and needs no equipment.

e.g. In a plumbing class the teacher using his hands continually to show where one part goes in relation to another. Notice here that you keep repeating the new term rather than using words like 'this', 'that' and 'it'.

Students need to keep hearing the new word.

e.g. The nozzle (not ' this') fits into the ...

8.4 EXAMPLES

Examples can be the real thing as with samples of sewing or welding. They can also be examples recalled from job experiences. Many teachers are very good at this.

e.g. A building teacher keeps giving examples from his work experience of times when safety regulations were or were not followed.

8.5 DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES

Learning a new word for something involves knowing in what way this new word is different from related words and ideas already known.

e.g. To understand the concept of inertia, students think about what happens in 'inertia' seat belts in cars.

8.6 TRANSLATION

Occasionally it may be faster for a student in your class to explain a word for other students in their own language. This is a quick way of providing meaning for the new English term.

8.7 PARALLEL EXPERIENCES

A further way to make clear the meaning of new words is to remind students of parallel experiences they have had.

e.g.. In explaining new terms in nursing subjects, teachers make parallells between the arteries and busy highways.

SUMMARY

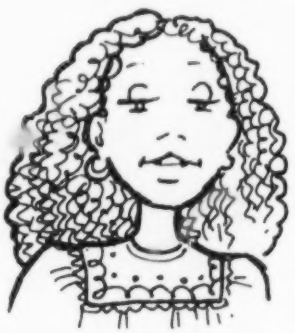
- ❑ Choose an appropriate method to explain the meaning.
- ❑ Repeat the new word many times.
- ❑ Avoid the normal speech pattern of using reference words (it, which, this).

9. ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO USE NEW LANGUAGE

As we have seen in the last chapter, understanding new terms in a subject is fundamental to understanding the subject. Unfortunately many students, whether new speakers of English or not, remain at the passive or receptive stage in their use of the language of their subject.

Could you estimate what the proportions would be for your students?

I understand ——% of the words when I hear them and _____ % of the words when I read them.



I use __ % of the new words in writing. I have a chance to say ___ % of the words in classroom activities.

If you estimate that the percentages are better for understanding than using the language (and they usually are), then you can start to increase the active language opportunities in your classroom.

As a start, how many of the following are blocks to the use of new language by all students in your class?

OBSTACLES FOR SOME STUDENTS

- ❑ Questions tend to be answered by those whose language expression is already faster.
- ❑ Not feeling confident with the pronunciation of a new term.
- ❑ No need ever to say the new terms in class.
- ❑ Few natural opportunities to discuss the new subject with others.
- ❑ Not hearing or reading the new terms often enough.

You may think of other obstacles. More positively, what are the opportunities for students to use the words?

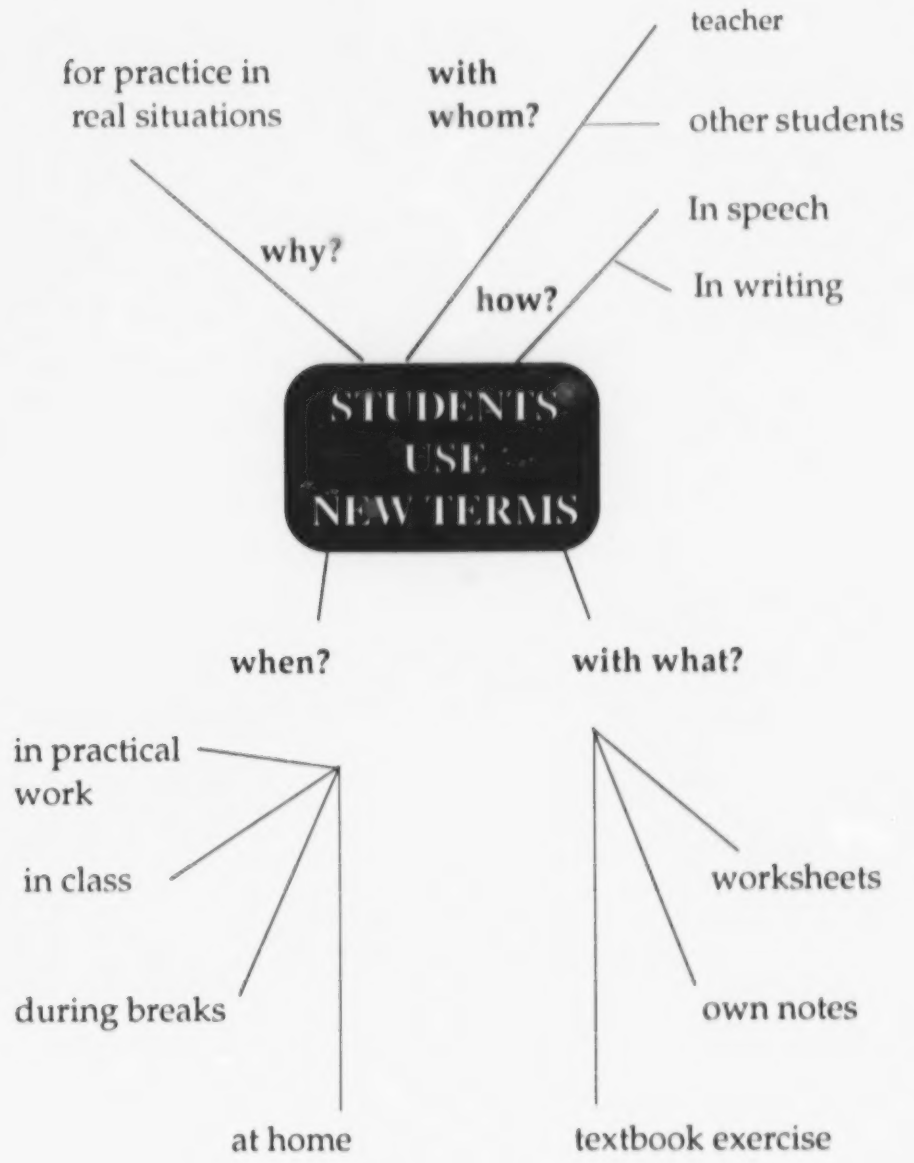
Here are some ideas to start you thinking. They are not complicated to organise.

- ❑ At the end of one lesson or the start of the next, each student must write out a question that uses at least one new term and which requires a new term in the answer. Spend a few minutes having the questions fired around the room.
- ❑ Provide an unlabelled diagram to be completed as students read a paragraph or listen to you describe it.
- ❑ Students work in pairs to check each other on unfinished sentences.

e.g. The /process of ... is called ...

Thinking creatively will lead you to find many ways in which students

can start using the new terms in speech and in writing. Exchange ideas with colleagues in other subjects. Add to this sketch.



10. TEACHERS' QUESTIONS

All courses for teachers emphasise the skill of asking questions. We ask questions to make students think about new ideas, to check their understanding, as a model of the inquiring mind and because some jobs require people to be able to answer questions.

In multicultural classrooms there are some further considerations:

- How familiar are your students with speaking out in class?
- Do they expect that for each question there is only one 'right' answer?
- Is it more difficult for them to think of the words for the answer than the ideas?
- Can they distinguish between rhetorical questions and those that you want an answer to?
- Do they realise when they need to give a reason for their reply as well as stating a fact?

You may have to train your students in some of these aspects.

How MANY ANSWERS?

If students are familiar only with closed questions you may have to encourage them to keep thinking. Look at some ways in which teachers question classes and receive students' answers. Which of these might lead students to answer more questions?

10. TEACHERS' QUESTIONS

Yes, that's right. Can anyone suggest another example?

Tell me why we hold the tool this way?

No, that's not the answer I told you yesterday!

You've given me part of the answer. Good. Who can add something?

Let's hear a few opinions on why this safety regulation exists.

X, you haven't answered for a while. Here's a tricky one for you.

Yes. Keep going. Someone else? Yes, and another..? That's it.

Obviously some teachers need to word their questions better. Others need to work on the encouragement aspect of their questions.

WORDING OF QUESTIONS

Generally (but not always) classroom questions starting with 'what', 'when' and 'where' suggest a 'right' answer. However, you can always indicate that there are several possible answers.

e.g. What *might* happen if ... ?

Let's think of some times when ...

What *could* you do if ...?

ENCOURAGEMENT

Apart from the occasional answer designed by a student to entertain the class, most responses represent someone's attempt to think. With students from a variety of cultural backgrounds it is even more important to give positive reinforcement to their efforts at answering.

Of course there are questions to which there is only one answer. Mathematical calculations are an obvious example. On the other hand, if your motive is not only to check understanding but also to encourage thinking, you will move more towards 'open' questions.

Section two dealt with other aspects of encouraging students to think.

CONCLUSION

The chapters in this booklet have raised as many questions as they have answered. That is the intention.

A second intention is to suggest that good teaching practice for multicultural classes makes good teaching for all students.

We wish you all the best in your teaching.

REFERENCES

In preparing for the topics in the first edition of this booklet we referred to several articles from the following journals:

Many Voices, Ministry of Education, Wellington, New Zealand.

Tutor, the journal for New Zealand's Technical Institutes, Polytechnics and Community Colleges.

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McGreal, Rory, "Coping with Large Classes" in *English Teaching Forum*, Washington, April 1989.

Strasheim, Lorraine, "The Issue: Multi-level Classes", in *Foreign Language Annals*, October 1979.

Nugent, Dean and Zepke, Nick (eds) (1987) *The Teacher Self-Help Book*. Tutor Education Centre, Central Institute of Technology, Trentham, New Zealand.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Marilyn Lewis: Trained teachers for Polytechnics in the northern part of New Zealand at the time of these workshops. Has taught secondary and tertiary classes in New Zealand and Asia and is now a senior lecturer on the Diploma in English Language Teaching in the English Department at the University of Auckland.

Ray Taylor: has a career in international education. He is currently High School Principal of the United Nations International School in New York. He has previously taught in Egypt, Germany, Italy, Britain and New Zealand. For nearly two years he was training teachers in New Zealand Polytechnics, based at the Auckland Institute of Technology.

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